

Renewable energy proposal addresses some vital concerns

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Americans overwhelmingly support increasing the generation of electricity from renewable sources. And why shouldn't they? Renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, biomass and geothermal can help us fight climate change, save American consumers big-time dollars, help rural economies and create thousands of manufacturing jobs.

Moving quickly to take full advantage of readily available clean energy options is especially pressing in light of U.S. Department of Energy projections that America's demand for electricity will increase roughly 30 percent by 2030.

Today our nation has no long-term policy to spur our use of renewable resources while we strive to meet this projected increase in electricity demand. To change that we have teamed with almost 130 co-sponsors in the House to bring forward legislation that would require a growing share of the nation's electricity to be generated from clean, safe, domestic renewable sources like wind and solar power. Our "Renewable Portfolio Standard" legislation provides a market-based mechanism that calls for 20 percent of the nation's electricity to be produced from renewable sources by the year 2020.

The environmental benefits derived from increasing the market share for renewable energy resources cannot be overstated. Renewable energy sources produce electricity without emitting conventional pollutants that contribute to acid rain, smog, mercury and other hazardous substances, and provide a crucial start in the effort to reduce the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. Studies have shown that a standard like the one in our bill will reduce 400 million tons of carbon-dioxide pollution each year.

Implementing a renewable portfolio standard also makes sound economic sense. According to a recent report from the energy research firm Wood Mackenzie, a standard would produce substantial economic benefits to our country. They found that a standard with a slightly lower requirement than our legislation would save nearly \$240 billion in wholesale power costs, lower natural gas costs over the next 20 years, and create a net benefit of more than \$100 billion for American consumers. The report also projects that by 2026, wholesale electricity prices would decrease by 7 percent to 11 percent as a result of the increased reliance on renewable sources.

With the stability of a federal standard, the growing renewable energy industry will create hundreds of thousands of well-paying jobs. Already, renewable energy is a major source of new jobs in the otherwise rapidly declining manufacturing sector. The wind energy industry now contributes directly to the economies of 46 states through manufacturing, services, and the construction and operation of wind power facilities. The CEO of GE Energy recently testified that "wind and solar energy are likely to be among the largest sources of new manufacturing jobs worldwide during the 21st century." A Union of Concerned Scientists study found that a 20 percent renewable portfolio standard by 2020 would create more than 350,000 American jobs.

Moreover, renewable energy can help revitalize and preserve rural areas. Farmers and rural land owners in windy areas are reaping payments of \$3,000 to \$8,000 per turbine per year, while still being able to work their land. The wind harvest can carry pressed farmers through difficult times, like droughts, even if crops fail.

As energy legislation comes to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, we are offering the Udall-Platts renewable portfolio standard proposal as an amendment. Over 23 states and the District of Columbia are already successfully implementing the standards.

The debate this month will be a historic opportunity for Congress to establish a long-overdue national policy that will create jobs, respond to the threat of global warming and promote our energy security simultaneously. Energy legislation that fails to include a long-term national strategy to promote renewable electricity would squander an important opportunity to put America on a path to revolutionize our economy as we work for a cleaner environment.

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